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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE: ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1998
Item 9 of the provisional agenda**
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES BY THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

Letter dated 18 June 1998 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in accordance with its mandate to promote international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Seminar was held on 27 and 28 April 1998 at Cairo. Its theme was "Facing the challenges of the year 2000: promoting Palestinian national development".

The Seminar provided a forum for an exchange of experience and expertise on various aspects of the current and future challenges facing the Palestinian people in their efforts to promote Palestinian national development, and on the role of the international community in this regard, particularly in the light of the growing hardships posed by the occupation. The Seminar was attended by donor and other Governments, intergovernmental organizations, organizations and entities of the United Nations system, officials of the Palestinian Authority

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and non-governmental organizations active in the field, as well as experts from the region and elsewhere. The Committee considers that the Seminar was a useful gathering and hopes to have made a constructive contribution to international efforts aimed at promoting an improvement in the living conditions of Palestinians and in their prospects for social and economic development, which are essential for the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the region.

I have the honour to attach for your information the report of the Seminar (see annex). I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter, together with the report, circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 20 (d) of the preliminary list, and of the Economic and Social Council, under item 9 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Ibra Deguène KA
Chairman
Committee on the Exercise of
the Inalienable Rights of
the Palestinian People

ANNEX

REPORT ON THE

UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE
TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Theme:
"Facing the challenges of the year 2000: promoting
Palestinian national development"

Cairo, 27-28 April 1998

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Organization of the Seminar

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in accordance with its mandate to promote international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Seminar was held on 27 and 28 April 1998 in Cairo.

B. Participation

2. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was represented by a delegation comprising Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman; Mr. Ravan Farhadi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman; Mr. George Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur; Mr. Martin Andjaba (Namibia); and Mr. Nasser M. Al-Kidwa (Palestine). The Committee Chairman served as chairman of the Seminar, and the Committee Rapporteur as rapporteur of the seminar.

3. Invitations to participate in the Seminar were extended to Governments, intergovernmental organizations, organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, and non-governmental organizations active in the field. A number of experts were invited to make presentations at the Seminar.

4. The following Governments were represented: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Egypt, Eritrea, Finland, France, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Japan, Jordan, Malta, Mauritius, Niger, Oman, Panama, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Viet Nam, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

5. The following organizations, agencies and other entities of the United Nations system participated: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); Universal Postal Union (UPU); Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

6. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: European Community (EC); League of Arab States (LAS); and Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

7. The delegation of Palestine took part in the work of the Seminar.

8. Mr. Nabil Shaath, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority delivered a statement as a keynote speaker.

9. The following experts presented papers: Mr. Ali Shaath, Assistant Deputy Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, Palestinian Authority; Mr. Jonathan Paris, a Fellow in the Council on Foreign Relations working on United States/Middle East projects; Mrs. Ghania Malhess, The General Directorate of Economic Affairs at the League of Arab States; Mr. Hassan Abu Libdeh, President, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestinian Authority; Mr. Marwan Khawaja, Professor of Sociology at Birzeit University; Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories; Mr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Head of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs in Jerusalem; Mr. Simcha Bahiri, Co-Chairman of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Tel Aviv; and Mr. Joseph Bock, Country Representative of the Catholic Relief Services in the Palestinian territory.

10. The following non-governmental organizations participated as observers: Arab Health Centre, Jerusalem; Ard El Insan, Palestine Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue, Tel Aviv; Conféderation générale italienne du travail, Rome; General Arab Women's Federation; Palestine International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, Damascus; International Catholic Migration Commission, Switzerland; International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Switzerland; Legal Research and Resource Center for Human Rights, Cairo; National Young Women's Christian Association of Egypt; Near East Foundation, Cairo; North-South XXI, Geneva; Palestine Council for Justice and Peace, Ramallah; Palestinian Committee for Social and Psychological Health, Gaza; Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Center, Jerusalem; Palestine Red Crescent Society, Cairo; Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee, Gaza; Palestinian Trade Union Federation; Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Gaza; Princeton Middle East Society, United States of America; Sabeel Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem; Social Development Committee, Israel; Terre des Hommes, Jerusalem; Union of Local Associations in the Unrecognized Villages in Israel; United Nations Association for International Service, Jerusalem; World Muslim Congress, Pakistan; World Young Women's Christian Association, Geneva; and World Federation for Mental Health, Cairo.

C. Agenda

11. The purpose of the Seminar was to provide the framework for an expert discussion on promoting Palestinian national economic and social development as well as encouraging the role of the international community for providing assistance to and helping the Palestinian people in overcoming internal as well as external obstacles in implementing its plan of development. The Seminar also aimed at building on seminars on economic and social issues held under the Committee's auspices during the past five years and providing information on the Palestinian Authority's Development Plan for 1998/99 and the recently concluded population census.

12. In the plenary session and in the course of three round-table discussions, the participants addressed the following issues in depth:

(a) Planning Palestinian national development: challenges and prospects;

(b) The Palestinian development plan;

(c) Gathering information for future planning: the results of the Palestinian census; and

(d) Overcoming obstacles: the role of the international community.

D. Opening of the Seminar

13. At the opening session, a statement on behalf of the Government of Egypt, the host country, was made by Mr. Mustafa Abdel Aziz, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs. A statement on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations was read out by his representative, Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, Under-Secretary-General and United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Statements were also made by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and Mr. Nabil Shaath, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Palestinian Authority, representative of Palestine.

14. In his statement, Mr. Mustafa Abdel Aziz, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, stressed the long-standing support of Egypt and the significance of the Palestinian question in the mind and conscience of the Egyptian people and Government. He said that the long siege and closure of the occupied Palestinian territories by Israel have badly constrained the Palestinian economy and caused a serious drop in the income and a significant increase in the unemployment rate. This has been further negatively affected by the lack of commitment of the donor countries to fully meet their financial obligations to the Palestinian Authority. He stressed that the efforts to find a solution to the question of Palestine have been for a long time at the forefront of United Nations concerns, and led to the Madrid conference and to the historical compromise between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which was reflected in the Oslo agreements and principles. He ended his statement by expressing hope that the seminar would succeed in making the Israeli Government aware of the fact that the only way for Israel to be accepted as a normal member in the Middle East region was through the establishment of peace and not through policies of hegemony, expansion and annexation of lands.

15. In a message read out on his behalf by Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Mr. Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, said that the series of seminars convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People have been useful in bringing a wide variety of issues to the attention of the donor community and in stimulating debate. The United Nations family could make an essential contribution to the peace process by helping to establish solid foundations for peace in the occupied territories, including an effective infrastructure, institutional capacity and, most importantly, improved economic and social conditions. The office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, based in Gaza since 1994, was doing all it can to strengthen United Nations action and had provided emergency assistance in the

face of adverse circumstances. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and UNDP have both played significant roles in developing economic and social assistance programmes to respond to Palestinian need. Other parts of the United Nations family are present in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and have demonstrated the commitment of the United Nations to help the Palestinian people. The Secretary-General recalled that during his recent visit to the region he had appealed to all the leaders of the parties to the conflict, as well as to representatives of civil society, to continue to build on the achievements of the peace process. He concluded that the theme for this year's seminar was particularly appropriate and inspired participants to redouble their efforts and reminded them of the magnitude of the task ahead.

16. In his statement, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, reiterated that since its inception, the Committee had emphasized that the United Nations has an historical duty and responsibility to render all assistance necessary to promote the economic development and prosperity of the Palestinian territory, and called for the mobilization of the resources of the system in this regard. He added that the Committee's efforts have acquired particular intensity since the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the establishment of a new reality in the Palestinian territory. Despite the serious stalemate in the peace process and the resulting aggravation of tensions on the ground, and despite the grave situation confronting the Palestinian economy, the Committee believed that the United Nations, and the international community as a whole, have a moral obligation to continue to do whatever is in their power to help the Palestinian people surmount the current difficulties and advance towards a just peace. He said that there is growing consensus within the international community on the fundamentals for a solution to the question, and unanimous desire to contribute in practical ways to the valiant Palestinian efforts to overcome their history and to build their nation. He concluded that ultimately only the end of occupation, the achievement of a just settlement which respects the rights and needs of all parties, and the establishment of normal relations between all the peoples of the region, on the basis of mutual respect, will lead to self-sustaining national development.

17. In his statement as representative of Palestine, Mr. Nabil Shaath, Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, Palestinian Authority, said that the Seminar had been convened under a challenging and forward-looking title. Presenting a bleak image of the economic conditions prevailing in the Palestinian territory and the inability to draw a manageable and sustained development plan under the Israeli harsh measures, he said that the social-economic situation would have been worse without the international community's contribution, which reached US$ 500 million a year for development, plus another $300 million for UNRWA. He went on to explain that closures, seen abroad primarily as a problem for Palestinian workers employed in Israel, were a multifaceted method of control and subjection of the Palestinian economy. He described in detail the resulting negative impact of those Israeli policies on the development of the Palestinian economy. We are in a critical phase and without free movement of people, there can be no economic development, no peace, no autonomy, he declared. Concluding, he said that the Palestinian Authority needed international pressure on the Israeli Government in order to end the

closures, and international assistance to continue to build its institutions, and to prepare for the future.

II. PLENARY SESSION

Planning Palestinian national development: challenges and prospects

18. The plenary session, entitled "Planning Palestinian national development: challenges and prospects" comprised a keynote address and statements by representatives of intergovernmental organizations, donor countries and United Nations agencies and bodies. Speakers expressed support and encouragement for the prospect of Palestinian national development plans and voiced concerns regarding obstacles facing planning and development.

19. In his keynote address, Mr. Nabil Shaath, Minister for Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority, emphasized that, de facto, the Palestinian State existed already; however, it was under siege. At the end of the transitional period, on 14 May 1999, the independent State would be formally declared, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the struggle for real independence would begin. He said that planning for Palestinian development had started in 1988, but the signing of the interim agreements in 1993 had led to drastic changes in the approach to a national development plan. The first plan after the Oslo agreements was based on close cooperation with the World Bank, which had oriented itself towards the Palestinian needs and had tailored the plan to the positions and wishes of the donor community. By the end of 1997, the first three-year plan had been worked out, containing an integrated planning approach by combining long-term goals and short-term steps to react to Israeli closures and other obstacles.

20. Elaborating on the impact of the closures, he defined them as a policy of siege and containment of the Palestinian territory through a system of measures to intervene severely in the interrelations of different groups of Palestinian society, with the aim of continuing the Israeli economic hegemony. He said that more than 30 years of Israeli occupation had led to severe structural imbalances in Palestinian society. The new Palestinian development plan was geared towards the creation of new job opportunities, ending the decline of national income and encouraging private investment. In conclusion, Mr. Shaath pointed to three favourable factors that should help the Palestinian people to face the challenges: the high level of education provided for a unique human structure; the unique geography should enable tourism to become the major factor for economic growth; and, given the end of the cold war, the Palestinians should be able to learn from the lessons of other peoples that no total planning was feasible.

21. The representative of the Organization of the Islamic Conference stressed the continuous support of his organization to the Palestinian cause and the Middle East peace process and called for coordinated efforts to persuade Israel to stop the judaization of Jerusalem; to end its policy of building settlements on Palestinian land; to lift the siege imposed on the Palestinian people; to

adhere to the agreements it signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); and to resume the negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

22. The representative of the League of Arab States said that the impasse in the peace process and the political difficulties imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people have critically hindered the economic development and the life conditions of the Palestinian people.

23. The representative of the Organization of African Unity conveyed a greeting from the Organization's Chairman and referred to several recent resolutions of the Organization, which reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital; stressed the need to preserve the territorial integrity of the Palestinian land; and called upon Israel to end its settlement policies, its violation of human rights and the closures of the Palestinian areas, and to adhere to its commitments to the implementation of the peace agreements it signed with the Palestinians.

24. In his statement, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic expressed his appreciation for the United Nations efforts.

25. The representative of Belgium said that his Government's political position was reflected in the different documents adopted by the European Union on the issue. Assistance to the Palestinian people was channelled to UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority. In support of UNRWA, Belgium contributed to its education programme, to its programme for the advancement of women, the construction of schools and the hospital in Gaza. Through the Palestinian Authority, Belgium contributed to the rural electrification around Nablus, construction of housing in several areas and a medical centre in the old city of Jerusalem. The exchange of professors with Palestinian universities continued and a section for cooperation was created in the Belgian Consulate.

26. In his statement, the representative of Japan warned the participants that the current political situation might bring potential danger and future risk and urged the concerned parties to resolve the pending issues including the further redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank and the "time-out" on unilateral steps, including the construction of settlements. He stressed that financial support for the parties concerned is one of the major pillars of Japan's Middle East diplomacy and said that Japan is now a major donor to Egypt, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and the Palestinians, with assistance focused on raising living standards and upgrading infrastructure for economic and social development. He added that Japan's assistance to the Palestinians to overcome the various obstacles amounts to more than US$ 350 million since 1993. He said that the current Israeli Government had ignored the progress in the peace negotiations, which was made in Madrid, and refused to acknowledge the results of these negotiations as bases for furthering the peace process. He concluded by expressing the hope that efforts by the international community would bring a bright future to Palestinian children.

27. The representative of the Universal Postal Union described the efforts made by his agency to assist the Palestinian Authority in developing its postal

services, including the contribution of material and equipment for specific projects and providing training courses for postal personnel.

28. The representative of UNDP said that his agency's programme of assistance to the Palestinian people in the occupied territory covers a broad range of sectors and projects, including agriculture, governance and public administration, rural development and Bethlehem 2000.

III. SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLES

Round table I

The Palestinian development plan

29. In this round table, panellists addressed the following sub-topics: goals, strategies and priorities of national development; economic indicators; and social conditions.

30. Mr. Ali Shaath, Assistant Deputy Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, Palestinian Authority, said that the Palestinian Development Plan for 1998-2000 was the first attempt by the Authority to develop an annually renewable multi-year development process to meet the diversity in investment and the extensive needs of the Palestinian people. The plan was prepared through intensive inter-ministerial coordination in cooperation with the World Bank, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, and the Governments of Norway and Japan. The plan is aimed at the creation of a stable economy and the improvement in living conditions, taking into consideration the negative impact of the Israeli restrictive measures and the stalemate in the peace process. It also focuses on issues of social and economic infrastructure and developing financial and other services which facilitate economic growth and industrial efforts. He added that in order to assist in implementing this plan, the Palestinian Authority is focusing on the following national priorities: developing water and waste-water networks and improving the means of transportation; establishing a sound legal and regulatory framework; improving education, health and housing facilities; and developing industries that stimulate economic development.

31. Mr. Jonathan Paris, Fellow, United States/Middle East Project, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, said that there has been a steady deterioration in the Palestinian economy since the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993 and that gross national product (GNP) per capita is estimated to have declined by at least 20 per cent in real terms. He enumerated six reasons why the increase in the private sector, which is the leading sector for investment and export, is not happening and provided suggestions to overcome this problem. First, he said, the physical infrastructure is not sufficient and its development is faced with lack of agreement with Israel; secondly, lack of freedom of movement owing to Israeli measures is discouraging investors; thirdly, there is a lack of infrastructure, including the lack of legal frameworks governing the use of natural resources, commercial, marketing and financial systems; fourthly, obstacles in implementing the Paris Economic Agreement of 1994 between Israel and the PLO are preventing or hindering Palestinian export; fifthly, the

agreement for developing an industrial zone along the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip was not implemented; and sixthly, the huge amount of donor assistance pledged in 1994 has not materialized with enough projects on the ground. He concluded that in addition to the need for real progress in the peace process, which is significant for economic development, there are certain measures and actions which could enhance economic growth if implemented, such as opening the borders, including the airport and the seaport; securing safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank; harmonizing the judicial system between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; opening the Carni industrial zone; payments of donors to catch up with their pledges; and other measures.

32. Ms. Ghania Malhees, Director-General for Economic Affairs, League of Arab States, said that the Palestinian development plan could not be discussed in isolation from the necessary barometers needed for planning. She suggested that the conditions of occupation and the lack of control by the Palestinians over their national resources, including land and water, and restrictions imposed on mobility of people and resources within and outside the Palestinian territories are posing major obstacles on development and planning. In addition, the Palestinian experience in making strategic development planning shows, so far, the inability of implementing those plans owing to Israel's policies and its refusal to implement the political and economic agreements with the Palestinians. She noted that the international community and the donor countries, in particular, have backtracked on their obligation to pressure Israel to carry out its obligation, by shifting their contribution for strategic economic development into relief aid and compensation for damages caused by Israeli policies. She concluded that under those conditions and given the continuous Israeli damaging measures, the peace process has created a partnership which works to the advantage of one party, Israel, at the expense of the other, namely, the Palestinians.

Round table II

Gathering information for future planning: the results of the Palestinian census

33. In round table II, panellists discussed the following sub-topics: the Palestinian people: structure, trends and historical perspective; and the Palestinian labour forces: characteristics, skills, trends and potential.

34. Mr. Hassan Abu Libdeh, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics of the Palestinian Authority, considered the Palestinian population and housing census as one of the major undertakings that the Palestinian Authority has carried out since its establishment. He believed this census would eventually prove to be a key step in the self-determination process, not only on the political track but also in the conceptual perception of Palestinian national development. He added that the goals of the Central Bureau of Statistics, which was established in 1993, were set to first close the gap and then to proceed into internationally recognized regular activities. This led to conducting two preliminary censuses: the first in 1994 was on the economic establishments and the second was the housing and population census, concluded in December 1997. The master plan of the Central Bureau of Statistics has,

according to him, focused on three areas, which are crucial for national planning. These areas are the Palestinian individual household; the Palestinian economy/establishment; and the land and farm registry. He said that the results of the census indicate that on 9 December 1997, the total Palestinian population in the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, was 2,896,310, of whom 50.75 per cent were males. He also indicated that the Palestinian population of Jerusalem totalled 323,000, including 210,000 in areas annexed by Israel. He was confident that the results of the census are providing enough social and economic indicators for the Palestinian national planners and that additional databases, particularly on labour forces, will be established based on the information provided by the census. He said that the Palestinian labour force in the territories constitutes 20 per cent of the population and 40 per cent of the qualified population for manpower (16 years old and above) and that it grows by 6 per cent annually. He said that in 1997 the rate of employment reached a high point of 70 per cent, and concluded that the rate of unemployment is higher among the more skilled labour and that in the Gaza Strip it exceeds that of the West Bank by 10 to 15 per cent.

35. Mr. Marwan Khawaja, Professor of Sociology, Birzeit University, said that the Palestinian population figures, which were estimated by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS), the only source until the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, may have, according to the World Bank, a downward bias as high as 15 per cent. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) 2.7 million Palestinians were living in the Palestinian territories, as of mid-1997. Of these, 1.7 million were living in the West Bank and 1 million in the Gaza Strip. He added that preliminary results from the 1997 census show a close figure of about 2.9 million persons, including residents who were living abroad for less than a year. These results also show that the median age is 16 years and that 47 per cent of the population is under 15 years of age. He said that emigration has been a significant factor in determining population change and indicated that as a direct result of the 1967 war nearly one fifth of the West Bank population moved to Jordan and between 1967 and 1968, 8 per cent of the Gaza Strip population emigrated. Emigration continued during most of the Israeli occupation however, but, he added, as a consequence of the Gulf War, there was net immigration as Palestinians returned to the territories. Since the end of 1967 through the beginning of 1994, there was, according to him, an increase of 85 per cent of the West Bank population and 90 per cent of the Gaza Strip population, which was mostly due to the high fertility rate and the decline in mortality. In conclusion, he said that according to the projections made by PCBS, the Palestinian population would double to nearly 4.7 million between 1995 and 2012, a period of only 17 years.

Round table III

Overcoming obstacles: the role of the international community

36. Panellists in round table III addressed the following sub-topics: obstructions and challenges; efforts by the Palestinian Authority; the role of Governments and intergovernmental organizations; experience of United Nations programmes and agencies; and action by non-governmental organizations.

37. Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, said that since the signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993, there has been a conscious emphasis in United Nations activities on promoting and supporting the development efforts in the Palestinian-administered territories. Consequently, the number of United Nations agencies undertaking programmes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has grown to reach 30 in 1997. As many as 13 of them have offices in the territories at the present time compared to only three - UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund and UNRWA - in 1993. He stressed that the broad objective of United Nations assistance is to shift away from emergency relief measures and to try to focus on long-term sustainable development. The United Nations is involved in particular in assisting the Palestinian Authority in creating the institutions, processes and systems that are vital to governance, as well as in undertaking specific projects in different sectors of economic and social activity. The activities of United Nations agencies, he concluded, have been concentrated in the main on national capacity-building and on promoting sustainable development.

38. Mr. Joseph G. Bock, Country Representative, Catholic Relief Services, Jerusalem, said that there are three main emphases of non-governmental organization work in the Palestinian territory: (a) socio-economic development, to bring about symmetry, i.e., bringing per capita GNP, water availability, education and the like of the Palestinians in close parity with that of the Israelis; (b) advocacy for justice, to bring about political symmetry in terms of giving Palestinians greater control over their own destiny; and (c) bridge-building between Palestinians and Israelis, to promote good will and to foster reconciliation. He offered three major objectives for non-governmental organizations involved in socio-economic development, including striving for symmetry in the business relations between Israelis and Palestinians; building bridges between the parties without demonizing the powerful party; and promoting disciplined information processing.

39. Mr. Simcha Bahiri, Co-Chairman, Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Tel Aviv, reviewed obstacles to Palestinian economic development imposed by Israel, including unequal trade and financial structure; hostile government policies, including closures of the territories; discrimination and restrictions against Palestinian industrial products and other measures. He then talked about Palestinian-based obstacles, including indigenous socio-economic factors; lack of proper institutions; and lack of suitable infrastructure for industrial development. He concluded by underlining the need for more international capital investment and technical assistance.

40. Mr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Director of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs in Jerusalem, said he was convinced that the Palestinian Authority has to declare the Palestinian State in 1999. "We have all the legitimacy, all the tools, and all the possibilities to do it and I think our people will be united behind PLO leader Arafat when he does it." He then asked what the Palestinian people should expect the international community and the donor countries in particular to do when such a State is declared.

IV. CLOSING SESSION

41. Closing statements were made by the representatives of Egypt and Palestine, and by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

42. In his statement Mr. Ahmed Gomaa, representative of the host country, said that the speakers and participants in the United Nations Seminar were able to present a clear picture of the obstacles as well as the challenges facing the Palestinian economy. He added that they also presented economic options, which would give the Palestinians hope for a better future. He concluded that obstacles imposed by Israel on the Palestinian economy were negating its obligations with regard to the Oslo agreements and that the only way to prosperity for the two peoples was the advancement of the peace process based on justice, equality and mutual respect.

43. Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, expressed the belief that the Seminar had undoubtedly enriched the Palestinian experience in the field of planning and economic development. He then summarized the main themes of the Seminar, including the efforts made by the Palestinian Authority; international assistance and contribution; and the need to end Israeli measures hindering development and to adhere to the political as well as the economic agreements signed by the parties.

44. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that the Seminar, and the International Non-Governmental Organizations Meeting which had preceded it, had focused on economic and political themes, respectively. They had, nevertheless, many elements in common. It was observed during the Seminar that economic measures by themselves could not resolve fundamental political issues. Conversely, political action requires a favourable economic environment in order to succeed. Underlying the discussions in both meetings was the consensus on the responsibility of the international community, including the United Nations, Member States and intergovernmental bodies, for ending the 30 years of occupation and 50 years of dispossession of the Palestinian people. It is of great encouragement to the Committee, he concluded, that many speakers in the Seminar have expressed the view that the establishment of a Palestinian State is inevitable, and have expressed their support for it as the only viable solution.